

ATTACHMENT A:

Taxpayer Protocol

Task Order 11, Phase 2: User Testing



Taxpayer Protocol

EITC Task Order 11, Phase 2

User-Centered Testing of www.irs.gov/eitc



EITC Website Usability Interviews with Taxpayers
Session Recruitment Screener

Hello, may I speak to [TAXPAYER NAME]? My name is [INTERVIEWER NAME], and I am calling from Westat, a private research company in Rockville, Maryland. We are conducting a research study for the Internal Revenue Service.

The IRS would like to learn what it's like for taxpayers when they try to search for information on their website about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). [If needed: The Earned Income Tax Credit offsets federal taxes on earned wages for working families and low income individuals.] We would like to know if you would be interested in helping us test their website and give your feedback about how you think it works.

You are being invited to participate because you are a taxpayer and might look for information about the Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC] on the Internet. We are having people come to our Rockville, Maryland office to work with the IRS website during the week of December/January [xx]. This should take about an hour and a half from start to finish. To thank you for your participation, we will provide you with \$150 cash.

Your participation in this activity is voluntary. Participation will not affect your taxes or your tax status. Identifying information about you will *not* be shared with the IRS and we will not ask you about any personal information.

[IF NEEDED: If you like, I can give you an address where you can send comments about the time and burden for this research study. The address is Internal Revenue Service

Tax Products Coordinating Committee
SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP
1111 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20224.]

[IF NEEDED: If you have any questions about the study or need more information, you may email Mary.J.O'Brien@irs.gov].

Would you be willing to participate?

IF YES: Thank you very much. I need to obtain a few pieces of information from you. [GO TO PAGE 2]

IF NO: [THANK AND END]

① NAME: ADDRESS: WORK PHONE: CELL PHONE: EMAIL:	
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② ARE YOU THE PERSON IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD WHO PREPARES THE TAXES, OR BRINGS THE TAXES IN TO BE PREPARED?

Yes No >> MAY I SPEAK WITH THAT PERSON? [RUN SCREENER AGAIN OR SET APPOINTMENT FOR CALLBACK]

Name/Appointment time/Best Tel No. _____

③ DID YOU FILE A TAX RETURN LAST YEAR? (Check one.)

No
 Yes
 Not sure

④ HAVE YOU EVER USED A PERSONAL COMPUTER?

Yes No >> **THANK & TERMINATE**

⑤ HAVE YOU EVER USED THE INTERNET TO SEARCH FOR ANY KIND OF INFORMATION?

Yes No >> **THANK & TERMINATE**

We would like to invite you to come to our Rockville office to help test the IRS.gov website. In the session we will be asking you to help us evaluate the Earned Income Tax Credit portion of the IRS website. The session should take about an hour and a half, and to thank you for your participation, we will provide an honorarium of \$150.

DID THIS TAX PAYER ACCEPT OR DECLINE THE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE USABILITY SESSION?
(Check one.)

- Accepted
- Declined participation. >>Describe reason he or she declined:

SESSION DATE & TIME: [January XX, 2009, /TIME]

Website Evaluation of irs.gov/eitc
Script for Taxpayer Interviews

NOTE: Instructions to the moderator appear in blue font.

I. Introduction and consent

Thank you for taking the time to help us out today. I'm _____ and I work here at Westat, a research company that does work for a lot of different government agencies on a wide variety of topics. What we're doing here today is helping the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) learn how to improve their website.

Today I will ask you to use the IRS's website to find information about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). In case you're not familiar with it, EITC is a tax credit designed for individuals and families who work but don't earn a lot of money. Taxpayers who file for it on their tax return could end up paying less tax, or even getting a refund. [If participant asks for more information, we have brochures s/he can take home about EITC after the session.]

Today I want to learn what it is like for you as a taxpayer to look for information about EITC on the IRS web site. The goal of this project is to make sure that taxpayers using the IRS web site will be able to find information they need about EITC easily. I'll be asking you to use the irs.gov website to find different kinds of information that are posted for taxpayers and to share your reactions with me. Your feedback will help the IRS make the best changes to improve the website. This session will last approximately 90 minutes.

That is a one-way mirror [point to mirror]. One of my Westat colleagues is back there taking notes while you and I work in this room.

[If IRS is observing session, read:] Observers from the IRS are also here today to observe and see for themselves how people use the site.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and you have the right to skip any question or stop at any time. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your tax status and identifying information about you will not be shared with the IRS.

With your permission, we would like to videotape today's session. The video will focus on your on-screen activities and what you and I talk about during the session. We will not videotape your face, because we want to protect the privacy of your participation today.

This consent form covers several important points about your participation. Please read it and I'll answer any questions you may have. [Ensure participant is agreeing to participate, have him/her sign one copy of the Taxpayer Consent Form and keep one copy for himself/herself.]

Before we get started, I'd like you to fill out this brief questionnaire. Please let me know if you have any questions as you fill it out. [Hand the Taxpayer Pre-test Questionnaire to the participant to complete before continuing.]

II. Website testing

I'm going to ask you to find some information that the IRS has posted on the irs.gov website for taxpayers using this computer. Please work through these tasks as you would if you were at work or at home, at a speed that's comfortable for you. Remember that we're testing the site, we're not testing you.

You might have some questions as you work. Please go ahead and ask them, because I'm interested in learning from you what isn't clear or easy to understand. However, sometimes I may not be able to answer your questions, because I need to see how you use the site on your own. We'll have some time at the end so I'll ask for your feedback about your experiences using this site.

Do you have any questions at this point? [\[Answer any questions the participant has.\]](#)

As you're working through the set of tasks I give you, please say out loud what you are thinking, and tell me what you are looking at and clicking on as you do it. To give you an example of what I mean, if we were having you test a website like Amazon.com you might tell me what you're doing by saying something like, "I'm scrolling down the page to see what kinds of DVDs they have."

I will be most interested in hearing what you expect to see when you click on something, and what you like and don't like about the site. Occasionally, after you've said or done something, I may ask you to tell me more, so that I can better understand how you interpret and act on the information you see.

Are you ready to start? Do you have any questions? [\[Answer any remaining questions the participant has.\]](#)

[\[The computer should be booted up and set to the irs.gov home page, but make sure the monitor is clicked off before asking Q1.\]](#)

Q1. Let's pretend that you wanted to look for information online about EITC on your own, from home or work. Tell me what you would do (what actions would you take) to try to find information about EITC on the Internet.

Probe: Would you use a search engine? (Google, Yahoo, others) [Note which engines P mentions]

If search engine, ask: What are some of the key words you would type in the Search box to help you find this information?

Probe: Other actions?

[Turn the monitor on to display the irs.gov home page on the screen.]

Now we'll begin working with the computer. We'll start at the home page for the IRS website.

[Make sure that the participant has a copy of the [Taxpayer User Tasks](#).]

Here is the task I would like you to start with. Please read the task out loud so I can follow along with you.

- Moderator should follow along with own copy of the Taxpayer user task packet.
- For each task, note the paths/webpages that the user selects to reach targeted information and the questions they ask along the way.
- Note areas where user seems to get hung up or lost and the actions they take to get back to where they want to be.
- For each task, if participant was not able to complete the task or breaks off, have her/him try to get back to the IRS.gov Home page on their own. If participant is unable to return to that page, note this and set the screen to the home page by using the HOUSE ICON.

III. Post-test and questions from observers

- After all tasks have been completed or time limit reached, hand the [Taxpayer Post-test Questionnaire](#) to the participant to complete before proceeding to the debriefing questions.
- Check with your observers during this time to see if they have any other questions.

IV. Debriefing and wrap up

Okay, I'd like to ask you some specific questions about what it was like for you to use this website. [Administer the [Taxpayer Debriefing Protocol](#), tailoring to participant's experience as necessary. Monitor time against remaining session activities.]

[Remember to give the cash incentive and get the participant's signature on the incentive receipt.]

Thank you very much for your help today. We appreciate your input!



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OMB No.: 1545-1349

WEBSITE EVALUATION OF IRS.GOV/EITC

Consent for Participation and Session Recording

We are asking you to help us with a project that we are conducting for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Today's activity involves testing parts of the IRS.gov website to learn about how people look for information about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on the site. We will use the information you give us today to provide recommendations to the IRS for improving the website. We will be asking you to look for different kinds of information on the website and to provide your opinions about how it works. The session will take approximately 90 minutes.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and you have the right to stop at any time or to refuse to answer any question. The things you say may be put in a written summary of this discussion, but you will never be identified by name, and there will be no way to identify who said what.

Also, we would like to videotape the session. Sometimes it is helpful to review a portion of a tape as we make recommendations to the IRS for revisions. The videotaping will focus on your verbal feedback and on-screen activities. Your face will not appear on the tape to protect the privacy of your participation and eliminate the potential for identification.

If you agree to participate, please read and sign below.

I, _____,
(Print your name here)

consent to the video recording of this session, which is being conducted by Westat to support the IRS evaluation of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) webpages on irs.gov.

I acknowledge that my participation in this session is voluntary, and that I will receive \$150 for participating today. I understand that the recordings will be used only by the research staff to accurately capture the experiences I had while working with the website, and that my name will not appear in the summary report.

I am aware that my participation in this website evaluation will have no effect on my personal tax status, that identifying information about me will not be shared with the IRS, and that all of the information I share today is protected under the Privacy Act.

Participant's Signature/Date

If you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, please write to the, Internal Revenue Service, Tax Products Coordinating Committee, SE:W:CAR:MP:T:T:SP, 1111 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20224. The OMB reference number for this project is 1545-1349.

IRS.gov Website Usability Evaluation

Taxpayer Pre-Test Questionnaire

We would like to learn a little more about you. We will not use your name with this information. If you do not want to answer a question, you can skip it and move to the next item. All of your answers will be kept private. **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON ANY PART OF THIS FORM.** Please let us know if you have any questions.

1. **Are you...?** *(Please check one.)* Male Female

2. **What is your current age?** *(Please check one.)*

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 19 or younger | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 - 59 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20 - 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60 - 69 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 - 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 40 - 49 | |

3. **What is the highest level of school that you have completed?** *(Please check one.)*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11 th grade or less | <input type="checkbox"/> Some college |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12 years of school, no diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> College degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GED | <input type="checkbox"/> Post-graduate work/degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate (diploma) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other <i>(specify):</i> _____ |

4. **How long have you been using a computer?** *(Please check one.)*

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 or more years

5. **How long have you been using the Internet?** *(Please check one.)*

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 or more years

[Please continue on the other side.]

6. On a typical day in the past month, how many hours do you use the Internet for work-related and/or personal reasons? _____

7. Have you ever used the Internet to search for information about taxes? (Please check one.)

No → **STOP HERE.**

Yes → **CONTINUE TO QUESTION 8 ON OTHER SIDE OF PAGE.**

8. About how many times have you ever searched for information about taxes on the Internet? (Please check one.)

1 time

2 to 5 times

More than 5 times

9. Briefly, please tell us about the kinds of information about taxes you have looked for on the Internet.

10. Which websites have you used to search for information about taxes?

11. Have you ever used a government web site, such as www.irs.gov, to look for information about taxes?

No → **STOP HERE**

Yes → **Which website(s)?**

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!

Website Evaluation of irs.gov/eitc Taxpayer Task Scenarios

Participant Instructions:

- Begin each task by starting from the www.irs.gov home page.
- Read the task out loud so the interviewer can follow along with you.
- Tell the interviewer what you're doing while you're looking for the information on the website. (For example: "I'm scrolling down the page to see what it says at the bottom.")

- Task 1.** You recently heard on the radio that some people can pay less in taxes, or get a bigger tax refund if they claim something called the "Earned Income Tax Credit", or "EITC", on their tax return. You are thinking about claiming EITC on your taxes this year, but you're not sure if you can. Look on the irs.gov web site for information that tells you what makes a person eligible to claim EITC.
- Task 2.** You think you might be able to claim EITC on your taxes this year. You don't have any children, but your 10 year-old niece has been living with you most of the year. Your neighbor told you she thought you could probably claim your niece as a dependent when you file for EITC on your taxes because she lives with you. Use the irs.gov website to learn what the rules are for claiming a child as a dependent when you file for EITC on your taxes.
- Task 3.** You're wondering if you make too much money to be able to claim EITC on your taxes this year. Use the irs.gov website to find out the highest amount of "earned income" a person can have to be able to claim EITC on their taxes.
- Task 4.** Your sister's house in Louisiana was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. She has asked you to look online to see if there is a way she claim this loss on her taxes. You know she files for EITC on her taxes every year. Look on irs.gov to find information about special rules that can help victims of Hurricane Katrina when they file for EITC.
- Task 5.** A notice recently went around at your work telling employees that they can get their EITC tax refund in advance by having it added to their paychecks if they filed a form in the Human Resources office for something called "AEITC". You don't know what AEITC is and want to learn more about it to see if it's something you want to receive. Use the irs.gov web site to learn what AEITC is.
- Task 6.** Your tax preparer told you that you will be eligible to claim EITC on your taxes this year, but he didn't say how much of a tax credit you'll get. Use the irs.gov website to find an online tool that will let you figure out how much of an EITC credit you could get on your 2008 taxes.

IRS.gov Website Usability Evaluation Post-Test Questionnaire for Taxpayers

Think about your experience using the www.irs.gov website today. Please use the check boxes below to tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON ANY PART OF THIS FORM.

Strongly Disagree ←————→ Strongly Agree

<i>(Please check one box for each statement.)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. The webpages with information about EITC that are posted on www.irs.gov are organized in a logical way.					
2. I could tell what I needed to do on the website to complete the tasks I worked on today.					
3. I had difficulty finding information about EITC on the website.					
4. I like using the IRS.gov website to find information about EITC.					
5. The website helps me to find information about EITC easily.					
6. I am not familiar with many of the terms used in the EITC pages on this website.					
7. If I came back to this website later, I would be able to find the information I found about EITC again pretty easily.					
8. The screens on this website are cluttered and distracting.					
9. New Internet users would find this website easy to use.					
10. Experienced Internet users would find this website easy to use.					
11. This website has useful information about EITC that some taxpayers might need.					
12. I would recommend this website to other people.					
13. I consider this website to be one of the better <u>tax information</u> websites that I have visited. (Write "N/A" if you have never been on a tax website before today.)					

IRS.gov Website Usability Evaluation

Debriefing Protocol for Taxpayers

Note: Interviewer to ask these questions of the respondent. Instructions to Interviewer appear in blue font.

A. General Reactions/Opening

[Display www.irs.gov Home Page on screen as you ask questions in Sections A & B.]

1. Overall, what was it like for you to use this website?
 - What did you like most about using this website? Why?
 - What did you like least about using this website? Why?
2. Now that you've worked with this website, how much computer or Internet experience do you think people who use it need to have?
 - Tell me more about that...

B. Usability and Navigation

[Continue to display the irs.gov Home Page on screen as you ask the following questions.]

1. How easy or difficult was it to try to find information about EITC when you started from the IRS Home Page? Why?
2. What do you think about the way you moved or "navigated", through the IRS website to complete the tasks you worked on?
 - By "navigate" I mean the series of links that you had to click to reach the information.
 - [If positive]: Why do you like [whatever participant mentions]?
 - [If negative]: How would you prefer to navigate?
3. What do you think about the amount of scrolling (moving the mouse down to see everything on a page) you needed to do to see the information posted in some sections of the website?
 - [If positive]: Why do you like [whatever participant mentions]?
 - [If negative]: What would you change?

4. What do you think about the tabs listed at the top of the screen here? [Point out the tabs in gray – Individuals, Businesses, etc - under the IRS header on the Home Page.]

- Are any of these tabs labeled in a way where you weren't sure what would happen when you clicked them? If Yes, which ones?

5. Was there any time when you wanted to use the '**Search**' function?

[If participant used it on their own while completing tasks, ask: "Tell me about the times you decided to use the Search function."]

- [If yes]: Tell me more about when and why you needed to use Search.

[Direct Participant's attention to **Search** function in upper right corner on screen]

- What are some of the key words you would want to be able to enter into Search to find information about EITC?
- What kinds of information do you expect to come up when you use Search on this website?

6. Was there ever a point when you felt "lost" while using the website?

- If Yes: Tell me more about that.

7. How easy or difficult was it to get back to the IRS Home Page when you needed to? Why?

[Click on the "Individuals" tab at the top of the webpage to display the "Tax Information for Individuals" webpage.]

8. How easy or difficult is it to find information about EITC from this webpage (the Tax Information for Individuals page)?

- How easy or difficult do you think it is to find this particular page? Why?

[Now display the www.irs.gov/eitc page on screen.]

9. This is considered the EITC "Home Page" on irs.gov. How easy or difficult is it to get to this page from the irs.gov Home Page?

10. How easy or difficult do you think it would be for taxpayers who want to find information about EITC from this webpage (the EITC Home Page)?

C. Screen Presentation

[Keep the www.irs.gov/eitc page (EITC Home Page) on screen.]

1. What do you think about the way this screen looks?
 - Colors?
 - Font size and type?
 - Topic arrangement?
 - Graphics?
 - [If positive]: Why do you like [whatever participant mentions]?
 - [If negative]: How would you suggest changing the look of the screen?

2. What do you think about the links, labels, and terms about EITC that are used here and throughout the website?
 - Were any terms, labels or links unclear?
 - Which ones?
 - What would you suggest instead?

D. User Strategies

[Keep www.irs.gov/eitc (EITC Home Page) on screen. Only ask #1 if participant had trouble starting one or more tasks. Otherwise begin with #2.]

1. Where there any tasks you worked on where you weren't immediately sure how to start?
 - If YES, how did you figure out what to do?

2. Which of the information search tasks that you worked on were especially difficult to complete? Why?

3. Which was the easiest task to complete? Why?

4. Do the screens provide all the information you need as you are using the site? If not, what else do you need?

5. How did you know if you did something that was a mistake (e.g. clicked wrong link by mistake)?
 - What steps did you take to correct any errors you thought you made?

E. Content and Relevance

[Keep www.irs.gov/eitc (EITC Home Page) on screen.]

1. What do you think about the topics listed on the left menu bar (Under Individuals Topics and IRS Resources)?
 - Which ones are of most interest to you? Why? [Explore those used; determine level of interest in these topics.]
 - What additional information about EITC would you like to see on the site?
2. How useful do you think this website would be to a person who doesn't know what EITC is and wants to learn more about it?
 - What do you think should be added or changed to make the website more user friendly for people looking for information about EITC for the first time?
3. What special features should be added or changed to the EITC pages on the IRS website to make it more useful to you?
 - To what degree do you want the site to be interactive (e.g., chat rooms, blogs)?
 - IF INTERESTED: What kinds of things would you use these features for?
 - Would you find it helpful to be able to access media files (e.g., streaming video files) on the site? For example, the video might show an expert explaining EITC.
 - IF YES: Give me an example of a time when you might use such a file.
4. [For taxpayers who said they have used other tax websites per response to Item 10 on Pre-test Q]: How does this site compare to other tax-related web sites you've used?
 - What features, functions, or content have you liked about other sites that you think should be incorporated on the IRS site?

F. Use of Information

1. How would you use the information you find about EITC on the irs.gov website?
 - Use it to help you decide about filing for EITC?
 - Give it to your tax preparer?
 - Give it to other people you know?

2. Would you recommend the irs.gov website to other taxpayers (e.g., neighbors, family, friends)? Why or why not?

3. Do you think you would actually use irs.gov to find information about EITC? Why or why not?

G. Closing

1. Overall, how would you rate your experience using the irs.gov website to find information about EITC? Would you say...? [\[Circle participant's response.\]](#)

Very negative	Somewhat negative	Neither negative nor positive	Somewhat positive	Very positive
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2. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about this website that we haven't already talked about?